

## Faculty

# Mulcahy Teaches, Researches

The week after this interview, Dr. Ellyn Mulcahy, assistant professor of science, was on her way to a meeting of the American Public



Dr. Ellyn Mulcahy, assistant professor of science, is researching the impact of health education on Somali Bantu refugees.

Health Association, Boston, to present her research on the “Identification of the Health Needs of Somali Bantu Refugees through Educational Intervention.”

How an Irish native came to study Somali Bantu women in Kansas City is one of those uniquely American melting-pot stories, propelled by its protagonist, Mulcahy, who is smart, energetic and motivated to improve the health of low-income women and their children.

Mulcahy received her bachelor of science degree in microbiology with honors from the University College Cork, Ireland, and her doctorate in microbiology from Creighton University, Omaha. Her dissertation research determined how a specific infectious protein (PrP<sup>Sc</sup>) causes normal protein to change in Prion diseases, progressive neurodegenerative disorders like mad cow

disease and its human version Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

What brought Mulcahy to Kansas was a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Kansas Medical Center, where she also completed a master of public health degree with honors. Her research on Somali Bantu refugees was the capstone to her master’s degree, and an article with results is pending publication in a scientific journal.

When choosing her master’s topic, Mulcahy was interested in women facing healthcare disparities. That’s when she connected with Jewish Vocational Services, Kansas City, Mo., which was starting Practical Orientation for Women Refugees (POWR) to serve Somali Bantus relocated by the United Nations to Kansas City from refugee camps in Kenya.

While POWR addressed many orientation needs, Mulcahy was in charge of health education on topics of nutrition, prenatal care, child development, sexually transmitted disease and hygiene. The pilot program lasted from April 2005-2006, and Mulcahy followed up with two months of individual interviews with participants and data analysis. Her research looked at the impact of health education on the women.

Keep in mind that Mulcahy was doing all this while teaching at JCCC, where she started full time in 2005, part time in 2004. Mulcahy has now submitted a grant proposal to look at the effect of maternal health education on Somali Bantu children in Kansas City, Mo., through JVS, and in Wyandotte County through Catholic Charities.

Meanwhile at JCCC, Mulcahy has taught in the biotechnology program and developed online courses in microbiology and cell and molecular biology. She will assist Dr. Luanne Wolfgram in workshops for secondary educators as part of a Carl D. Perkins Postsecondary State Leadership grant to expand biotechnology career awareness in Kansas.

At 31, Mulcahy has surprised herself with her career track.

“I had really planned a strictly academic career in basic research,” Mulcahy said. “I didn’t realize teaching would be so attractive. Clinical and basic research are important, but with public health and teaching you see the impact more directly, more immediately.” 🌸